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RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE  
RUCNRCC/REFUGEE COORDINATOR COLLECTIVE  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0272  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3614  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 3817  
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 000359

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA AND NEA/IR FOLEY  
ALSO FOR IO ACTING A/S WARLICK  
PRM FOR ACTING A/S SAM WITTEN  
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY  
USUN FOR WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER  
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SUBJECT: LEBANON: UNHCR REPRESENTATIVE UPBEAT ON IRAQI

REFUGEES IN LEBANON

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Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

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[1](#)1. (C) Ambassador and Emboffs met with UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative Stephane Jaquemet on March 25, who described the current condition of Iraqi refugees in Lebanon. Jaquemet reported that he hoped to work with the Government of Lebanon (GOL) to amend its immigration law to grant permanent legal recognition to refugees in Lebanon. Jaquemet also discussed the status of other refugee groups in Lebanon -- including Sudanese, Syrian and Iranian refugees -- as well as the impact of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon and his appreciation for USG funding. End summary.

UPDATE ON IRAQI REFUGEES

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[1](#)2. (C) Jaquemet lauded the Government of Lebanon (GOL) for renewing an amnesty decree that allows those Iraqi refugees living illegally in Lebanon but not in detention to regularize their status. He said that UNHCR continues to have a strong working relationship with General Security, the GOL's lead agency on Iraqi refugee immigration issues. He noted that General Security is currently holding in detention fewer than 100 Iraqis, a significant decrease from the 700 Iraqis in detention this time last year. Also, the duration of detention has dropped from around six to nine months to an average of two months, he said.

[1](#)3. (C) Regarding resettlement, Jaquemet said that 300 Iraqi refugees have been resettled from Lebanon so far this year and he expects 2000 refugees to be resettled by the end of [1](#)2009. As the first few tranches of the most vulnerable and at-risk refugees have been resettled, UNHCR is seeing a decrease in the number of Iraqis offered resettlement. While the USG has continued to approve over 90% of the cases referred to it, European countries have approved approximately 60% to 70% of referred cases for resettlement.

Sweden, which in the past had a very liberal policy in resettling Iraqis, is approving fewer than 50% of referred cases. Jaquemet added that UNHCR is also seeing decreased approval rates in neighboring countries with large Iraqi refugee populations such as Jordan, Syria and Turkey.

#### CHALDEAN COMMUNITY SPLIT ON RESETTLEMENT

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14. (C) The Ambassador inquired on the status of Iraqi Chaldean Christians in Lebanon. She said Lebanese Chaldean leaders have told her in recent meetings that they are actively encouraging Iraqi Christians not to leave the Middle East. These leaders have offered assistance to Iraqi Christian refugees to persuade them to remain in Lebanon or return to Iraq. The Ambassador added that non-Chaldean Christian leaders, like the Maronite Patriarch, have also taken an interest in the issue of mass migration of Christians from the Middle East.

15. (C) Jaquemet described the Chaldean community as divided. Chaldean groups in the United States strongly favor resettlement of Chaldean Iraqis in the United States and other Western nations. In contrast, the Chaldean Patriarch in Iraq is not in favor of mass resettlement of Iraqi Chaldeans. Jaquemet also added that the number of Iraqi Christians in Lebanon is rising, as many continue to flee sectarian violence in Iraq. Unlike other groups, however, the majority enter Lebanon legally, often flying directly from Iraq to Lebanon.

#### AMENDING LEBANON,S LAW REGARDING REFUGEES

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16. (C) Jaquemet said one of UNHCR,s major goals is to change  
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the legal status of refugees under Lebanese law. Jaquemet acknowledged that because of the political sensitivities surrounding Palestinian refugees, Lebanon would not sign the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol. Instead, UNHCR is working to amend the 1962 immigration law to require the non-deportation and non-detention of refugees. The ultimate goal would be to have Lebanon accord non-Palestinian refugees a permanent formal status and prevent their arbitrary detention.

17. (C) Jaquemet said that Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud and the Chairman of the Parliament's Administration and Justice Committee, MP Robert Ghanem, have expressed support for amending the law. Jaquemet would like to submit a proposal on this to the Parliament, but he expressed doubt that any action would be taken in the final weeks leading up to the June 7 parliamentary elections.

#### STATUS OF SUDANESE, SYRIAN, AND IRANIAN REFUGEES IN LEBANON

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18. (C) After Iraqis, Sudanese nationals comprise the largest number of non-Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Jaquemet estimated there were approximately 700 Sudanese nationals registered with UNHCR in Lebanon, most of whom entered Lebanon illegally via Syria. Jaquemet said it was a challenge to screen legitimate refugees from areas like Darfur from Sudanese economic refugees who falsely claim to fear persecution.

19. (C) Jaquemet also discussed Syrian refugees in Lebanon. He said that UNHCR has registered approximately 200-250 Syrians, with 10 to 15 new registrants per month. Most of these individuals are high-profile political opponents of the Syrian regime whose bona fides have been verified by UNHCR or Syrian Kurds. So far the GOL has not obstructed the departure of Syrians refugees for resettlement, but Jaquemet raised the concern that this practice might change as the relationship between the Lebanese and Syrian governments

improves.

¶10. (C) UNHCR in Lebanon has also received around 35 Iranian Ahwazi refugees via Syria. The Ahwazi initially flee to Syria, where they register with and are processed by UNHCR. Many of the Ahwazi are eventually offered resettlement to Western nations, particularly Australia. At the behest of Iranian authorities, the Syrian government has stopped issuing these refugees the requisite permits to depart for resettlement, but they do allow them to cross over to Lebanon. Once in Lebanon, the Ahwazi refugees have made their way to the UNHCR office in Beirut to complete the resettlement process started in Syria, most going to Australia.

SPECIAL TRIBUNAL FOR LEBANON AND UNHCR  
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¶11. (C) Jaquemet also discussed the possible impact on UNHCR of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL), which is investigating the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri and related cases. He detailed a new case involving a Syrian national, Ibrahim Jarjoura, who was arrested nearly three years ago in connection with the assassination, but was released by Lebanese authorities in late February. Through his lawyer, Jarjoura has recently inquired about refugee status with UNHCR in Beirut, although a formal application has not yet been filed.

¶12. (C) Jaquemet said that Jarjoura is believed to be a former Syrian intelligence officer, who might now be aligned with the anti-Syrian March 14th coalition in Lebanon. While Jarjoura has not been formally interviewed by UNHCR, if he had ever participated in any type of human rights abuses he

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would most likely not qualify for status as a refugee or be offered resettlement. However, if Jarjoura has a credible fear of torture if he returns to Syria, then Lebanon, which is a signatory to the UN Convention against Torture, could not repatriate him back to Syria. Jaquemet said that as the STL proceeds, other individuals might apply for some sort of protection status, either asylum or refugee. He said he was consulting with fellow UN officials on the legal and political implications of Jarjoura's and any other future claims.

SINCERE GRATITUDE FOR USG ASSISTANCE  
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¶13. (C) At the end of the meeting Jaquemet expressed sincere appreciation and gratitude for the USG's support of UNHCR. He said approximately 50% of his overall budget was funded by the USG, while EU countries contributed only around 5%.  
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